

# Draft Records Management Policies & Procedures Manual

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This draft manual provides some Records Management basics regarding both active and inactive records. We hope that Town-specific and even department-specific policies and procedures, including the approved department-specific retention schedules, can be incorporated into this manual, making it a handy reference source for current and future staff or temporary employees.

Records Management is a shared responsibility. Reviewing this manual and determining what areas of active and inactive records management need attention is the first step for improving existing systems.

**There are some red letter rules.**

Know your records.

What do you create?

How long must they be kept?

Know who is responsible for what.

Who is responsible for creating, naming, storing, and maintaining the records?

If it is a shared responsibility, is it clear who does what, when?

Have the tools available to do the job.

Appropriate supplies

Label templates

Appropriate equipment

Space to work

Take the time to plan and implement

**Active files management**

Active files are those that have recently been created or received; no matter when they were created or received are used frequently. If these records are organized well at the start of their "life cycle", they can be easily maintained for however long they are needed.

**Basic steps**

Create a file plan

Develop and write down rules for spelling, numbering, or alphabetizing

Keep an up-to-date list of files and their locations

- Use appropriate filing supplies
- Use appropriate filing equipment
- Maintain the system
- Know the procedures for the transferring records that are no longer active to storage

## **File Plan**

### **1) Write down the current filing arrangement for each *record series*.**

Typical sequences are:

- Numerical order

- By a unique number

- Chronological order

- By date, fiscal or calendar year

- Alphabetical order

- By creator / originator name

- By case

- By geographic name (street, location)

- By subject

- Alpha - numeric order

- By a unique code

- Combination of ones listed above e.g. subject, and then by date

**2) Develop an index** for those filing arrangements that require them. Maintain it as a table or spreadsheet. Example: If the accounts payable record series is arranged by vendor number, an index identifying the vendor name with the vendor number is needed.

### **3) Identify records that fall within a subject file system.**

Small collections *i.e.* a few file drawers might be alphabetized by the name of the file. The first word determines the order.

Larger groups of records are typically organized in a two or three-level hierarchical system. There is a major (primary) category, and as many as two additional levels, with the last level being the file title. Each level might be alphabetically arranged. For example:

- Board of Education

- Disciplinary Hearings (by year)

- Names of students (alpha)

Residency Hearings (by year)  
Names of students (alpha)

The subject file system for paper and for electronic copies should parallel one another for ease of use and to make it possible to accomplish two tasks: entering the information once to update and maintain a list of files, and to create a folder label for the paper file; and moving like records when they become inactive.

**Rules for spelling, numbering, alphabetizing**

Develop and write down rules for spelling, numbering and alphabetizing if there are significant subject or alphabetical files. Consistency pays off by reducing search time when trying to retrieve information or documents.

- 1) Spelling. Are the names of organizations, agencies, the state going to be spelled out or are the initials or acronyms used? If a name starts with "Saint" will it be spelled out or "St" used?
- 2) Numbering. It probably makes sense to mimic computer applications, and have titles beginning with numbers come first. In paper filing they usually have been arranged as if the number were spelled out *e.g.* 2 Amigos Pizza would be filed in the T's as if 2 were "Two". For streets, the street name will likely be determine the filing scheme, with the street numbers put in sequence.
- 3) Alphabetizing. There are many example of alphabetic filing rules available online. If a street is St. Paul Street, will the file will be filed as if "St" were spelled out?

Develop cross-reference indexes for complex subject files. They are "see:" or "see also:" references. The "see" reference points to where the records and information can be found. The "see also" indicates that additional information can be found under another file title.

**Up-to-date Lists of Files and Locations**

It saves time searching for records if a description of the filing arrangement and a list of file names and their locations are maintained. It is also the first step in developing a disaster preparedness plan. By identifying what records are where, it will be easier to locate those records that are vital to business operations and to salvage them.

Number all storage equipment, drawers and shelves.

Draw an office layout showing the location of the equipment.

**Appropriate Filing Supplies**

Do not stint on folders or other filing supplies.

1) For heavily used records, or ones that are likely to exceed 3/4 inch in volume, use heavier weight folders or pockets.

For records that are unlikely to be accessed on a frequent basis, unlikely to exceed 3/4 inch in volume, or will remain in an office setting for no longer than three years, use manila folders.

Corner a folder along the score lines. If the sheets make the folder bulge, even after cornering the folder, it is time to create an additional folder. Put the date range of the contents of the older folder, and start a new folder.

2) One third cut or full tab folders or pockets provide space for labels. Full tab, in particular, permit several labels to be used *e.g.* date label and title label.

3) To improve readability of labels, do not hand write labels. Type labels in a *sans serif* typeface such as Arial using both upper and lower case. White mailing labels (1" x 2 5/8") are larger than standard file folder labels and work well.

Use alpha and numeric color code labels when they make sense, usually for voluminous record series with uniform headings, name of person, street, number.

4) Place labels in the same location on all folders. Staggering the location of tabs does not work because inevitably a folder is added and the sequence disrupted. Having all tabs in one position will make it easier to read the labels, and retrieve records.

5) Also do not stint on alpha guides for large records series that are in alpha orders so that it is easy to spot where to begin looking for a folder.

6) If more than one person will be accessing files, have File Out cards and pencils readily available. Out cards should be checked on a regular basis; and those who have taken the files asked to verify that they still have them and return them if no longer required. Even better is for everyone to get in the habit of making a photocopy of what they need from a file, and returning the file promptly.

### Maintaining the System

The best method of maintaining any system is to have one person in charge of a given set of records or all records in a particular functional area. There also needs to be sufficient cross-training so that at least one other person can find records, and knows what to do in the case of a vacation or lengthy absence of the lead person. The establishment of policies and procedures in writing is crucial if such consistency is to become a habit.

Make it a habit to spend time each week on some aspect of active files management. Have a to-do list; keep a notebook where you jot down what you have done, and where you left off. Even thirty minutes every week will make a difference.

### Transferring Inactive Records

Often records need to be kept for a longer period of time than their active life. They may even be permanent records, but their usage does not warrant office space. The end of a calendar or fiscal year is often a good time to identify and box inactive records.

Check the date range within a file. If nothing has been added to a file folder for the past three years, it is time to review the contents and determine whether the documents have any continuing value.

*For those paper records that must be kept for a limited length of time and then destroyed*

- Box like records together that have the same destruction date in a standard records center carton (10 x 15 x 12). It should have double walls and bottom; and a separate lid.
- Store folders standing upright (either letter or legal size folders will fit in a standard box). Make sure all folders have labels and all folders are facing the same direction.
- Remove all documents from three ring binders and put in pockets or folders. (Binders cannot be recycled with the paper, make the box heavier, and can damage the box). Label the pockets and folders.



- Put computer printouts in pockets. Label the pockets.
- Do not over-fill a box; use a second box.
- Prepare a folder list if necessary; keep one copy and put another copy in the box.
- Label the box according to instructions provided by the Clerk's Office.
- Notify Clerk's Office to have the box(es) picked up.

***For those paper records that must be kept PERMANENTLY –***

- Contact Clerk's Office to discuss type and quantity of records. Clerk's Office may wish to provide archival quality enclosures and assist in the boxing.

***Oversized plans, maps***

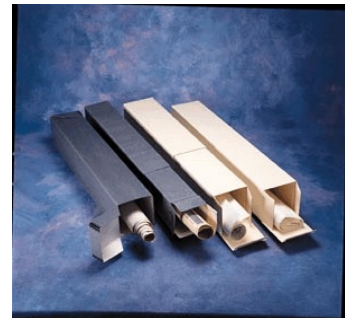
There are several options for oversized plans and maps.

Permanent ones of historical value should be stored flat in archival quality folders in steel map files. Contact the Clerk's Office.

Others that are permanent but with no "wow" factor might be:

- rolled and placed in archival quality tube box;
- rolled on an archival quality core and placed in an inert plastic (polyester or polypropylene) bag; or
- rolled on an archival quality core and then wrapped in a sheet of mylar.

Any of these enclosures are intended to protect the permanent record from dust and other pollutants. All, of course, must be labeled with sufficient identifying information so that the right plan or map can be found easily.



***Non-paper media***

Computer storage media, audio visual media and microfilm, even if not a permanent record, should not be stored in a records center that does not have temperature and humidity conditions equal or better than office conditions. A lower temperature and humidity is even better for long-term storage.

The preservation strategy for this media is the production of redundant copies: a master kept in optimal conditions, a use copy for access, and a security copy stored at another location. Even under such conditions, such media should be checked every five years for losses, and copied or migrated.